



Single Session Work with Families

Background

Single Session Work (SSW) is based on three empirical findings:

- The (modal) most common number of sessions in a large number of counselling services internationally and across many service types is one.
- It is difficult to predict which client will attend for one session and which client will attend for ongoing sessions.
- The majority (75%-85%), of counselling clients only attending for one or two sessions, who are often viewed as drop-outs or a service failure, report being satisfied with the service they receive.

If accepted, these findings encourage counsellors to make the most of the first, and sometimes only, session for all clients.

SSW has a range of applications and can be utilised by services which primarily work with individuals to engage family members in the 'treatment' process. This targeted approach is appealing to families because it is often difficult for family members to commit to ongoing work. A surprising amount can be achieved in one or two sessions and the SSW approach always leaves the 'door open' for further work with the family if required.

There is a growing body of research into the effectiveness of SSW with individuals and families in a variety of settings. Moshe Talmon was the first practitioner to thoroughly investigate the 'single session' phenomenon in psychotherapy. Victorians have also figured prominently in researching and training practitioners in SSW including Pat Bohyan, Jeff Young and Pam Rycroft. Dr. Ruth Perkins has recently published the results of a clinical trial using SSW family work in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health setting, which also highlighted the effectiveness of using SSW interventions with families.

What is SSW?

The SSW process usually involves one longer than normal face-to-face session (approximately 90 minutes), and a pre-session questionnaire combined with follow-up phone contact to determine whether the client wants or requires further sessions. A post-questionnaire can be included to measure client outcomes from the session. It is not a 'one-off' therapy but rather a structured first session which attempts to maximise the client's first therapeutic encounter, understanding that it may be the only appointment the client chooses to attend, while entertaining the possibility of ongoing work.

SSW is a type of service delivery framework and is not based on one particular therapeutic modality. This means that workers are free to practice SSW in a manner that fits with their preferred practice orientation while fitting within a basic structure outlined in the SSW training.

How is SSW implemented?

Effective implementation of SSW within a service usually requires:

- Completion of a **two-day** training course.
- An organisational plan, that incorporates some of the suggestions outlined in the SSW Implementation Parcel provided to each organisation, to enable staff to use SSW with families.
- Regular supervision for workers to discuss the clinical aspects of SSW.

Helping you plan: expectations and time requirements

The role of implementing Single Session Work with families

To maximise learning, practitioners are expected to lead the SSW Family Work initiative in the team or agency. **Initially** and where possible practitioners are encouraged to work in pairs when seeing families. Engagement of families can be difficult and will vary according to practitioners' existing levels of comfort and contact with families and agency contexts.

In services where SSW family work is provided in addition to existing individual work (ie. not specialist family programs), it may be realistic to have seen **three or four families within the first eight weeks**. As a general guide practitioners should aim to have two SSW Family sessions per week with the knowledge that it is likely for fifty per cent of those families will require further sessions.

Depending on clinical case loads (negotiated with manager) practitioners (who are not specialist family workers) should have no more than four families requiring sessions at one time.

Within the first month after training, we would expect practitioners to have commenced some implementation activity within their agency.

Total direct contact time per SSW - family session

Scheduling of sessions: It is very helpful if practitioners can offer some appointments to families outside of business or school hours to engage and to ensure most family members can attend where appropriate.

Direct contact time with a family per meeting (up to 2.5 hours total)

Allow at least ninety minutes per session. In addition you will need to allow between twenty and forty minutes of telephone contact with family members at the Follow-up phone call. It may be useful to have a short introductory telephone call with some family members before the session, this may also take between ten and twenty minutes.

Preparation and documentation (1.5 hours / meeting)

Sufficient time needs to be allocated for phone calls, pre-session preparation, post-session debrief and recording in the file notes

Internal agency SSW (family) group (1 hour / month)

It is anticipated that Managers will support implementation of regular monthly in-house meetings to progress the ideas of Family Inclusivity

Co-operative Inquiry Group Meetings (1.5 hours per month plus travel)

Two staff members will be asked to represent the agency at monthly CIG meetings. This is a critical component to the development and implementation of the SSW program within your organisation.

NADA staff will be available outside this time for further consultation and/or clarification of issues as required.

Regional & Rural Members: Training and CIGS maybe held regionally were numbers allow, travel subsidies and/or video conferencing may also be available if required.